

Eric Roper, *Star Tribune*

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi traveled to St. Paul's Lowertown area on Saturday to survey the empty halls of the historic Union Depot, which lawmakers hope to transform into a transportation hub, with the financial backing of the federal government.

Once the center of railroad activity in St. Paul, the mostly dormant building is expected to be on one end of a high-speed rail line that would link Chicago and the Twin Cities. It will also be home to the planned light-rail line between Minneapolis and St. Paul. The \$237 million renovation project is slated to begin this fall and be completed in late 2012.

The federal government has allocated about \$85 million for the effort, \$35 million of which came from the stimulus bill. Ramsey County has proffered about \$42 million, and planners still need to fill a funding gap of about \$100 million.

Pelosi was joined Saturday by Democratic Reps. Betty McCollum, Keith Ellison and Jim Oberstar, the chairman of the House Transportation Committee. Before holding a news conference, the group toured the concourse.

"This is the future," Pelosi told a crowd of reporters and local officials. "And I think that this is a lot of money, but a small price to pay for taking this region into the future."

Oberstar expressed frustration that U.S. railroads are slower than their European counterparts. "We should not be a Third World country in passenger rail," said Oberstar, who helped secure federal funding for the project.

GOP-backed challengers to Oberstar, Ellison and McCollum gathered with supporters across the street from the Depot to voice their frustration with the state of affairs in Washington.

Pelosi was also in town to attend a fundraiser for the Democratic Congressional Campaign

Committee at a private home, a DCCC spokeswoman said Friday.